

# Safari on the Slob.

## WNFC Field Trip to WWR, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2013

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*Report by John Kinsella*



One of the delights of a trip to Africa is the game drive; visitors are given a tour in a safe vehicle around the savannah with a local expert telling you about its wildlife and local history. On Saturday March 9<sup>th</sup>, we had just such a delight in the far-distant wilds of our own Wexford Wildfowl Reserve and North Slob. Given clearance by kind permission of the NPWS, the Field Club was given access to the Slob for three drives, each an hour long. Martin O'Connell was our driver and he made each trip in a 14-seater minibus over the rough rain-gnawed tracks as comfortable as possible. Chris Wilson was our esteemed local guide and like all good guides was a fount of good and interesting facts.



On a dull day, visibility was good and before or after each drive, club members could look out from the tower and hides, or indulge in tea, coffee and bikkies in the Visitor Centre, luxury in the wild. Many eyes make good birding and the drives produced a total of 50 bird species between them. Large flocks of Greenland White-Fronted Geese were the main attraction, being the flagship species for which the reserve was founded. Current numbers are healthy on the Slob this winter but the reserve's other flagship species, the Irish Hare, is in a very worrying decline even though we saw some on each trip.

The species spotted on the 3 drives.

- Wildfowl: (10) Greenland White-Fronted, Brent and Barnacle Geese, Shoveler, Mallard, Teal, Wigeon and Shelduck, Mute and Whooper Swans.
- Birds of Prey: (5) Peregrine Falcon, Kestrel, Hen Harrier, Buzzard, and a Short-Eared Owl.
- Waders: (5) Greenshank, Redshank, Curlew, Black-Tailed Godwit, and Lapwing.
- Songbirds: (22) Rook, Raven, Magpie, Jackdaw, Hooded and Carrion Crows (yes, crows are songbirds too, officially and I've classed the Hooded and Carrion as 2 species although there is debate there), Blackbird, Robin, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Wren, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, House Sparrow (no Tree Sparrow

this day sadly), Reed Bunting, Pied Wagtail, Starling, Dunnock, Pied Wagtail and Linnet.

- Pigeons: (3) Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove and Feral Pigeon.
- Other Birds;(5) Moorhen, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Black-Headed Gull and Pheasant.
- Mammals: Irish Hare and signs of Badger (they make their setts in raised hedgerows and on the islands above the water table).

A good time was had by all, and thanks are extended to Dominic Berridge for opening the reserve and facilities, Chris Wilson for his guiding and Martin O'Connell for providing and driving the minibus. Thanks also to the kind souls who brewed the tea and coffee and provided the biscuits.